

## **General Information for Judges**

First of all, thank you for judging! Without judges, there are no tournaments. Judges are probably the most important logistical aspect of any tournament. You will be expected to judge multiple rounds and often both individual events and debate events. Keep in mind that the schedule may fluctuate so be flexible and please do not leave the tournament until a tournament official indicates that you have fulfilled your judging commitment.

### **Who is qualified to be a judge?**

Generally, anyone who has completed high school can serve as a judge. A judge does not have to have been a competitor or a coach or even have any prior experience in order to judge. Most judges fall into three categories of individuals:

- A. Parents and community volunteers
- B. Former high school competitors.
- C. Coaches

At most tournaments, the first category makes up the majority of the judge pool.

### **Reporting for duty**

1. Please check in promptly to the judging room. You will receive important information regarding your judging assignments.
2. Please bring pencil, paper and a watch or digital timer with you.
3. Please bring reading material or work to occupy any down time you might have.
4. Listen closely to oral instructions.
5. Ask questions of the tournament official(s) if you do not understand something or would like further clarification.

### **After I receive my ballot**

1. Read over the ballot to familiarize yourself with the specific rules for the event you are judging.
2. Please go immediately to the room to which you are assigned.
3. The students are to enter the classroom with you. You should first call roll to see if all the students are present and make sure that none of them are contestants that you know. If they are, you must at once go back to the judges' room as it is against the rules to judge someone with whom you are familiar. If some of the competitors are not present it is a good idea to wait only a few minutes before starting the round because the absent students may be double entered and will be coming to the round late.
4. If you are judging Impromptu or Extemp, the students will enter the classroom one at a time to give their speeches. In impromptu the student will enter, draw a topic from you, have two minutes to prepare, and give a speech no longer than five minutes. In Extemp, the students will already have their topic. They will enter the room, give you their topic slip, and proceed immediately to speak for they have already had 30 minutes to prepare.
5. If you are judging LD there will usually be two debates (or four students) scheduled for that round. The second set of students is not allowed in the room while the first set is debating.

### **Where should I sit in the room to which I am assigned as a judge?**

Wherever you are most comfortable! If your hearing or eyesight is poor, you will probably want to sit near the front of the room. Keep in mind that some events permit movement around the room and thus contestants may not always be standing in the center. Make sure you have an unobstructed sight line from wherever you want to judge. It is perfectly acceptable to move chairs, desks, and contestants as needed to clear your sight line. Please return desks to their original positions before leaving the room.

### **Should I talk to the contestants in the round?**

Judges should not interact with contestants, other than a polite “Hello” to the students when you enter the room and a “thank you” when the round is done. If you know a competitor you must at once return to the judges room, as it is against the rules to judge someone from your own team or someone you know. It is **NOT** permissible to talk to students after a round about how you voted/ranked their performances. Oral critiques are prohibited. If you encounter a pressuring coach or student, report him/her to a tournament official.

### **Timing**

Please be aware that not all events have the same time requirements. Please consult the rules for each event prior to beginning the round. Time carefully, especially in the events that require time signals—impromptu, extemp, debates. A timer may be provided; if not, an observer may be appointed, or you will need to time and provide time signals. If a student goes over the time limit, note the violation on the ballot.

### **Filling out the ballot**

1. As the students speak, you should take notes. These will help you to make your decision at the conclusion of the round. (See Written Comments)
2. At the conclusion of the round you are to rank each competitor or indicate who won/lost the debate. You MAY NOT TIE any competitors, except for last place. Only one team can win the round, only one student may be ranked first, etc.
3. You may be hearing arguments and ideas with which you disagree. Try to keep personal biases out of your decision and judge only on the student presentation.
4. When judging interpretation events, you may consider the author’s intent in your decision. You may also consider appropriateness of a piece for a high school audience as a criteria for decision.
5. When you have completed your ballot, check to make sure that it is accurately filled out and then return it immediately to the judges’ room.
6. If you have any questions before or after the round, please do not ask the competitors for clarification of rules or violations. Ask the tournament official(s) for clarifications.

### **Making written comments**

1. Written comments are a vital part of the educational process. Students and coaches can use these comments to help improve their speeches for future competitions. These comments also help the students understand the ranking that you give them in the round, or why they won or lost a debate. Comments should be constructive in nature. Simply placing the word “good” on a comment form and then ranking the student last in the round will not help that student to improve.

2. While it is acceptable to criticize poor enunciation, one should keep in mind some impediments are beyond a student's control, such as a lisp or a non-English accent. These should not be a reason for a lower ranking unless it presents a significant barrier to understanding the speaker.
3. Students should be in appropriate tournament dress. If you feel a student is not professionally dressed that may affect your decision, especially if you feel the dress is distracting in any manner. However, please keep in mind that not all students have the same economic means to purchase expensive clothing. Neatness is more important than style. Any comments regarding dress or appearance should be clarified as suggestions and not placed as personal attacks.
4. Please do not make personal comments, either in writing or orally, such as "Great legs!" Only make comments that are directed to the student's speaking skills. Neither should you offer your personal coaching services.

**I'm hesitant to judge because I'm afraid I'll make the wrong decision. How do I make sure I'm making the right decision?**

There are no right and wrong decisions! YOU ARE THE JUDGE—the debaters/contestants are responsible for PERSUADING YOU. If they don't persuade you, they lose! Several judges could watch the same round, and no two judges' rankings or reasons for their decisions would likely be the same. Speech and debate is a "human activity;" we are all persuaded or affected by different things. One of the jobs of the debaters/contestants is to adapt to their audience. As the judge, you are the primary audience. Students must adapt their performances to what they think will persuade or entertain you. You are the sole determiner of which speeches are effective, and which speeches are not effective. The only reason a tournament official might question your decision is if you have failed to provide a clear explanation for your decision(s) on the ballot(s) for the round. You should keep in mind that there are rules and standards for each event. At the tournament you will receive a copy of the rules and you will be given further specific instructions for each event. Following these rules—and making sure that student contestants follow them—will keep everyone on a level playing field, allowing you to make easier and more fair decisions.

**Once again, thank you for judging!**

In general, you should try to encourage the competitors with your attitude and attentiveness. Many are participating in Speech and Debate not to win, but to have speaking experience, and so this should be an easy, friendly environment for them.

### **Judging Do's and Don't's**

Most people enjoy their experience as a judge. Following these guidelines will go a long way toward making your time as a judge pleasant and rewarding.

#### **DO...**

- Report promptly to the judging room at the assigned time, not only at the beginning of the day, but throughout the day.
- Accept all judging assignments that are given to you.
- Report to the assigned room on-time.
- Take roll using the competitors' codes. Allow a minute or two for students who might be lost.
- Ask students to turn off all electronic devices. Make sure you have turned yours off as well!
- Take careful notes of each presentation/debate.
- Keep time on all presentations and provide time signals to the contestants if there is no other timer in the room.
- Complete the ballot(s) and written comments accurately for each competitor.
- Use a pen and press down hard on debate ballots with multiple copies so that your writing is legible on all copies.
- Provide a clear reason for each of your rankings/win-loss decisions.
- Turn in your ballot(s) promptly after the round's conclusion.

#### **DO NOT...**

- Judge any competitor whom you know. You must at once return to the judges room, as it is against the rules to judge someone from your own team or someone you know.
- Switch ballots with other judges or take other judges' assignments.
- Allow anyone to video tape, audio tape, or photograph any round.
- Ask students what school they are from, as they will think you may be a biased judge.
- Interrupt, or allow anyone else to interrupt, a speaker or performance once it has begun.
- Penalize speakers for failing to dress professionally—not all students can afford business attire. You can, however, penalize a student for attire that is distracting to his/her performance.
- Confer with other judges if you are in a round where a panel of judges is used. Each judge should make his/her decision independently.
- Observe student performances when you have a round off, as you may be asked to judge those students in a future round.

### Examples of Judge's Comments

This is just a small sampling of comments that can be made on a speaker's ballot/comment form. Try to use both praise (positive) and constructive criticism (negative).

SPEECH ELEMENT	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Eye Contact	"excellent focus on the audience"	"eyes moved from walls to ceiling"
	"made me feel a part of your speech"	"looked around and over the audience"
Poise	"confident and polished presentation"	"fidgeting with hands"
	"your professionalism impressed me"	"avoid pacing back and forth"
Articulation	"excellent volume and speaking rate"	"some mumbling and slurring of words"
	"good variation of tone and vocal emphasis"	"needed to speak more slowly"
Quality of Material / Choice of Selection	"selection was well-suited for audience" (interp.)	"selection was too... for this audience" (interp.)
	"topic was interesting" (original)	"topic was too... for this event" (original)
Quality of Writing / Skill of Interpretation	"Fine character development" (interp.)	"gestures not true to character" (interp.)
	"great use of metaphor and analogy" (original)	"needed better support for main ideas" (original)

## Examples of Good and Bad Judge's Comments

from Lincoln/Douglas:

**Bad:** "I didn't think the affirmative understood her case very well. I had several problems with her philosophical analysis."

This is a bad comment because the judge is debating the debater. That is not the judge's job. The judge should work very hard to keep his/her personal beliefs and personal reactions from affecting the decision. What matters is whether the affirmative made a convincing case with adequate evidence and whether she was able to answer the refutations of the negative speaker.

**Good:** "The first reason I voted against the affirmative was that she did not answer two major negative attacks..."

This is a good comment because it not only identifies who won but it gives objective reasons why the judge voted the way she did, reasons that have nothing to do with the moral beliefs or politics of the judge.

from Duo Interp.

**Bad:** "You did a good job but Tennessee Williams plays always seem too depressing to me." [team was ranked fourth]

This is a bad comment because what the judge thinks of the literature should not be a factor unless it is a comment on the quality of the literature. Many plays can be depressing. It is not fair to the contestant to have their rank affected by your preexisting emotions and opinions.

**Good:** "You did a good job of separating your characters, but your faces and voices never captured the emotions that are in the words and scene." [team was ranked fourth]

This is a good comment because it gives a constructive compliment and the criticisms are factors within the control of the participants.

## SAMPLE COMMENT FORMS

(1) -----

Round: 1      2      3                      Event \_\_\_\_\_ Code: \_\_\_\_\_

General comments	+	-	Reasons
Poise			
Volume			
Articulation			
Gestures			
Facial expression/ Eye contact			
Quality of material/ Choice of selection			
Quality of writing/ Skill of interpretation			

-----OR-----

(2) -----

Round: 1      2      3                      Event \_\_\_\_\_ Code: \_\_\_\_\_

What in this presentation was done well?

What needs improvement?